

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Civic Suite A, Ground Floor, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 18 March 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor L M Simpson – Vice-Chairman in the Chair.

Councillors K J Churchill, D B Dew, J A Gray, A Hansard, C R Hyams, Mrs D C Reynolds, and T V Rogers.

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor I C Bates.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor M Baker

101. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16th March 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

102. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Churchill declared a personal interest in Minute No 104 by virtue of his membership of Cambridgeshire County Council.

103. REQUEST FOR A LOAN TO THE WILDLIFE TRUST FOR BEDFORDSHIRE, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH.

By way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered a request by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough for a loan to enable them to acquire the leasehold of land considered to be key to progress the Great Fen Project.

In discussing the background to the request Members' attention was drawn to the conclusions reached by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) on the matter. In that respect, Executive Councillors concurred with the Panel that any agreement should comply strictly with the terms of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and that flexible repayment arrangements should be explored rather than a cap on the maximum level of interest payable. Having been reminded of the Cabinet's previous decision to enter a Collaboration Agreement which included appropriate governance arrangements relevant to this stage of development of the project, it was

RESOLVED

that a loan of up to £1.2m to the Wildlife Trust for

Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire and Peterborough be approved subject to the Director of Commerce and Technology and the Head of Law, Property and Governance, in consultation with the relevant Executive Councillor, being satisfied with the terms, interest rate and security being offered.

104. RURAL STRATEGY FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2010-2015

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010 - 2015 produced by Cambridgeshire ACRE on behalf of the Cambridgeshire Together Board.

The Cabinet were advised that the Strategy had been commissioned to identify the challenges of living and working in a rural community. Members have been informed of the priorities accorded to the Strategy's three themes of living in the countryside, economic well-being and land and environment and the contents of responses to each of the actions proposed. In discussing a summary of officer responses to each of the proposed actions, Executive Councillors have endorsed their comments outlined in Appendix A to the report. Attention also has been drawn to the conclusions reached by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) and Members have concurred with the Panel that the strategy: -

- lacked evidence of partnership working and that any work carried out under the Strategy should be carefully co-ordinated;
- could potential lead to a duplication in service provision;
- failed to consider the locality of retirement homes in rural areas, to enable individuals to remain close to their families and communities;
- referred to "widening transport options" and that this matter requires action on a national scale; and
- failed to address the difficulties faced by residents living in rural areas who do not have their own transport and are reliant on other transport providers to attend health and other public service facilities.

Having noted that the Leader and the Chief Executive would be able to raise these issues at the next meeting of Cambridgeshire Together Board, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted and the suggested answers to the consultation paper set out in the Annex to the report now submitted incorporating the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels be endorsed, for submission to Cambridgeshire Acre.

105. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS WORKING GROUP

(Councillor M Baker, a Member of the Development Management

Process Working Group, was in attendance and spoke on this Item.)

Consideration was given to a report by the Working Group appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) to undertake a review of the Council's Development Management Process (a copy of the report is appended in the Minute Book). The study had involved discussions with the Chairman of the Development Management Panel and the Development Management Manager.

With regard to the Panel's recommendations, the Cabinet noted that several of the proposals have been already implemented by the Development Management Service. In concurring with the Panel that the current process was working well, although some areas mostly relating to enforcement and public speaking at the Development Management Panel could be improved, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the possibility of charging developers for pre-submission advice be investigated further;
- (b) that relevant consultees and neighbours be consulted again on amended plans, except for those with very minor significance;
- (c) that care should be exercised in relation to households that abut the development site, including the over-printing of envelopes with a suitable message to indicate that it is an important communication concerning a planning application;
- (d) that applicants be advised in the clearest terms at the outset of the process that they are unlikely to receive any further communication until all of the consultees' views had been received, which could be towards the end of the eight or thirteen week determination period;
- (e) that members of Town and Parish Councils be encouraged to undertake training on all aspects of the Development Management process;
- (f) that as part of the next review of the public speaking procedure the Development Management Panel be requested to give consideration to the possibility of a mechanism that allows external speakers to respond to what they perceive to be factually incorrect information so that the Panel can make well-informed decisions; and
- (g) that the Council continues to reinforces the message wherever possible that development that takes place without permission is discouraged and adopts an appropriate and robust approach concerning the retention of development where permission is subsequently refused.

106. EXCLUSION OF PRESS

RESOLVED

that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person.

107. SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE FOR NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC RATES RELIEF

The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) which sought an additional supplementary estimate of £20,000 for the National Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Budget for 2010/2011 to process an application for hardship relief.

Having considered the information contained in the report, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that a supplementary estimate of £20,000 for the National Non-Domestic Rates Discretionary Relief Budget for 2010/2011 be approved.

Chairman